

Statement from Congressman Ron Kind
Supporting H.R. 800
March 1, 2007

Madam Speaker, I rise today to provide my strong support for H.R. 800, the Employee Free Choice Act of 2007. Representing Wisconsin's workers in Congress is a privilege I am honored to have. That is why I am an original co-sponsor of H.R. 800, because protecting workers ability to form unions is of the utmost importance for the continued prosperity of our country.

Our nation's economic success depends on the viability of the American workers, but the current Administration's policies have created an unfavorable climate. I fear that if Congress doesn't act to protect employee free choice and change current labor law to discourage unfair labor practices by employers, the legislative victories of the past will be at stake. With the Employee Free Choice Act, which amends the National Labor Relations Act to establish a more efficient system for monitoring labor relations, I see an opportunity for Congress to do just that.

Americans have waged countless battles to improve conditions in the workplace and to pave the way for a better life for all working families. Yet today they lack the adequate measures to address workplace inequities and to safeguard against unfair labor practices. The National Labor Relations Act, enacted by Congress in 1935, no longer works to protect the right of workers to form and join unions. But the need to monitor relations between unions and employers is just as important today as it was 72 years ago.

The Employee Free Choice Act would combat obstructionist behavior by: 1) guaranteeing free choice through majority recognition; 2) facilitating initial labor agreements through mediation and arbitration; 3) and providing more effective remedies against employer coercion.

Having grown up in a labor household, I know there is no question that union workers benefit from a collective voice, thus improving the lives of all working Americans and their families. The wages of workers are 26% better than for non-union workers; and union workers generally have better healthcare benefits, pensions and disability compensation than workers not associated with a union. Therefore, it is clear to me that protecting the right to form a union is critical.

The current system fails to provide a responsive mechanism for workers when their rights have been unjustly denied. The Employee Free Choice Act makes necessary changes to the National Labor Relations Act to fill in the gaps of the current law and guarantee workers a voice without the threat of unwarranted penalties.

The rights of the American worker are far too important to ignore and not preserve. I promise to continue the fight against any changes that will reduce workers' benefits and pay while supporting initiatives that increase workers' rights and protections in the workplace. Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill and the rights of their constituents. I yield back the remainder of my time.